

Foster's Daily Democrat

Pease Greeters receive national recognition

By [Charles McMahon](#)
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PORTSMOUTH — It's a rare thing to see a Marine cry.

But tears and applause were one in the same on Capitol Hill this week, as Pease Greeter co-founders Capt. Ed Johnson and Chuck Cove traveled to the nation's capitol and were honored for the group's efforts in meeting and welcoming military personnel who pass through the Pease Air Terminal in Portsmouth on their way to and from overseas locations.

Representing hundreds of dedicated Pease Greeters, the pair received a standing ovation from a crowd that included members of the U.S. House and Senate, several high ranking military officials and Washington staffers.

As the leader of the Pease Greeters, Johnson said they gladly accepted the Distinguished Service award from the Military Officers Association of America Tuesday night in Washington, D.C.

Since the program began in 2005, Johnson said the Greeters have not missed a single flight, have met 350 flights and about 55,000 service members either coming home or heading overseas and have shipped nearly 15,000 pounds of care packages overseas.

Johnson's military service includes receiving a silver star after serving as a Marine Corps officer in Korea. Cove is a Vietnam veteran and served in the Army and the Marine Corps.

"Not only have we met American troops, but we met Norwegian, Canadian, Macedonian and British troops as well and we extended to them the same service and the same honors," he said.

Johnson said it was an honor to have the 370,000 member national organization recognize the Greeters and said he felt like the "guy in the Verizon commercial" when asked to accept the award.

"It was a great thing," he said.

Wearing their most formal uniforms, Johnson said he and Cove were the last to be honored during the ceremony and received the award from retired U.S. Marine Corps Gen. Richard I. Neal. "us as nice as anyone could've treated us," said Johnson. "They were so cordial and so nice to us."



Retired U.S. Marine Corps Gen. Richard I. Neal (left), Chairman of the Board of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) presents the MOAA Distinguished Service Award to the Pease Greeters, represented by co-founders and co-Chairman Charles Cove (center) and Chairman Edmund Johnson (right) at an April 20 ceremony on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. Courtesy photo by Steve Barrett

"There were colonels, majors, generals, admirals and all sorts of high ranking officers and they treated us as nice as anyone could've treated us," said Johnson. "They were so cordial and so nice to us."

Johnson said the accolade means the Greeters are in the same company as past recipients like Colin Powell, Tom Brokaw and Gary Sinise.

"We're in pretty good company listed with those previous award recipients," he said.

During the ceremony as the more than 300 guests in attendance rose and applauded the pair and their groups work, Johnson said he and Cove decided to react in one of the most appropriate ways by saluting them back.

Johnson said he remembers seeing tears stream down the faces of women who lost their husbands to war.

Perhaps the most emotional of moments took place after the event in the bar of the hotel both Johnson and Cove were staying. Johnson said he remembers entering the bar with Cove and watching as the many guests in attendance at the event stood up once again and gave the men a standing ovation.

"Everyone stood and applauded," said Johnson. "When that happens it really is very unusual."

During the social hour, Johnson said an MOAA official approached Cove and asked him if he would like to become an honorary member of the MOAA. Engulfed in his own enjoyment, Johnson said he was thrilled for his friend and the honor they bestowed upon him.

Johnson said Cove was so taken aback by the honor, including the offering of Second Lieutenant bars from an Admiral, that he had to excuse himself because of the tears welling up inside of him.

He said it's not often anyone will ever see a Marine cry.